

Strengthening our public schools

In 2003 the Legislature provided money to boost salaries for teachers with seven or fewer years' experience. It wasn't easy to find the money in a tight budget, but we wanted to help our districts attract and retain teachers.

This session we have an opportunity to help children who have no choice but to attend under-performing public schools – and their frustrated parents. Just as many districts offer alternative high schools to students who aren't succeeding at traditional high

schools, I want to give parents and their children an alternative. By creating charter schools we could offer students and their families increased flexibility in exchange for increased accountability. This could be particularly important in areas where traditional public schools have consistently performed below expectations.

The record-setting Marysville teachers' strike last fall has led to several bills related to settling school-district labor disputes. One of these would present teachers who walk off with some real consequences, like lost pay for each day out of the classroom. K-12 education is state government's number-one duty; we owe it to students and parents to come up with a method for keeping classrooms open.



Join me **February 21** for a **Town Hall meeting!**

Many of the most important decisions we will make this session will come in the final few weeks of the session. Saturday, February 21, would be an ideal time to hear your thoughts and concerns, so I may carry them back to the Capitol. Please mark your calendar and plan to join me at one of these meetings!

Saturday, February 21

10-11:30 AM	1-2:30PM	3:30-5PM
Kingsgate Library	Duvall Library	Lake Washington Resource Center
12315 NE 143rd	-Rose Room	16250 NE 74th St.
Kirkland	15619 NE Main St.	Redmond
	Duvall	

I hope you're able to attend one of these. If not, please write, e-mail or phone to share any advice, questions, comments or opinions with me. I appreciate hearing what's on your mind, because it helps me represent you better in Olympia!

Representative
Toby Nixon

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2004 Legislative Session Report

45th Legislative District

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Town Hall meetings!

February 21

- Kirkland
- Duvall
- Redmond



2004 Legislative Session Report

February 2004

Dear friends,

The state Legislature began its 60-day session in mid-January. We already are deeply involved in addressing important issues that in one way or another affect every resident of our state.

My goals for this year's session are much like they were in 2003, because the challenges are much the same. Number one, I'm focused on passing legislation that will help restore Washington's economic vitality. Number two, I'm concerned that people have lost faith in their government. I want to see the Legislature address issues like education, health care, public safety and our state's primary election system in ways that give our citizens reasons to have confidence again.

Please take a few minutes to read this report on the ongoing session – and please share your thoughts on the issues, or any concerns you have. Use my legislative e-mail address, contact me on MSN Messenger (tobynixon@hotmail.com), get a message to me via the toll-free legislative hotline, or put a letter in the mail to me. Also, I invite you to attend one of my Town Hall meetings in our district February 21. I am honored to serve as your representative and am always ready to help!

Sincerely,

Toby L. Nixon
Toby Nixon

Committees:

- Technology, Telecommunications & Energy – *Assistant Ranking Republican*
- Transportation
- State Government
- Joint Administrative Rules Review Committee
- Joint Legislative Systems Committee
- Vice Chair, House Republican Caucus

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State government on the Internet:

www.access.wa.gov

Promoting renewable energy sources

The technology for producing energy from renewable sources such as wind, solar, tides, geothermal, landfill gas, and biomass has improved considerably in recent years.

Expanding the diversity of our energy sources and the availability of energy from local, renewable sources will bring many benefits. It will improve our security by reducing dependence on foreign energy sources and the use of long-distance transmission lines for gas and electricity that are vulnerable to terrorists. It will help the economy in rural areas through the construction and operation of generation facilities and through the sale of crops that are converted to fuel. And it will help us all by reducing price fluctuations and protecting the environment.



In addition to encouraging energy conservation, we need to encourage utilities to obtain more of their energy from renewable sources. Several bills being considered this session would require utilities to gradually obtain more of their power from renewable sources, and provide tax incentives to help them pay for it. As Assistant Ranking Republican on the House Technology, Telecommunications and Energy Committee, I am working hard with representatives of environmental groups, utilities, the power industry, large power users, my fellow legislators, and other stakeholders to reach a consensus on a bill that will enable us to achieve these goals.

Fighting to keep the SR-202 widening project on schedule

The passage of Initiative 776 (\$30 license tabs) reduced funding for transportation projects. In response, the Department of Transportation and the state Transportation Commission have proposed delaying about \$40 million worth of transportation projects around the state, including the widening of SR-202 from Sahalee Way to SR-520.

Further delay in this project is not acceptable. The people of Redmond and Sammamish have waited a long time for this project, and should not have to wait any longer. The project is critical to improving safety, reducing commute times and fuel consumption, reducing air pollution, and improving the health of nearby streams and wetlands.

Senator Finkbeiner, Representative Ruderman and I are working together to insure that the SR-202 project is not delayed. You can help by sending emails to Rep. Ed Murray, chair of the House Transportation Committee (murray_ed@leg.wa.gov) and Sen. Jim Horn, chair of the Senate Highways and Transportation Committee (horn_ji@leg.wa.gov), and make sure they know how important this project is to you.



Helping Washington's families prosper again

We need to protect and increase the number of family-wage jobs in Washington. There are signs that the U.S. economy is rebounding, and I want to make sure Washington isn't left behind. We need to make more cost-reducing changes like those that helped convince Boeing to assemble its 7E7 jetliner in Washington. Other employers, like our high-tech industries, are at risk of closing or leaving our state.

The state-run workers' compensation system needs changes (for example, allowing private firms to offer industrial insurance would help). Increasing the small-business tax credit for the first time in 10 years would help Washington's small employers survive. We must reform the regulations that make it more costly to do business in Washington. It is particularly important that we renew the tax incentives for high-tech industries that have been in place for the past decade; otherwise, the incentives expire this year – and could cost jobs. Washington can't afford that.



Being responsible with tax dollars

Our state's financial picture is much better now than this time last year. Some legislators wanted to increase taxes in 2003; instead, the Legislature ended up making realistic decisions that prevented a huge budget deficit.

This year we will adopt a supplemental budget to cover spending changes that couldn't have been anticipated when the budget was adopted last year – things like higher K-12 school enrollments, or the cost of fighting last summer's wildfires. But we should not spend any more than absolutely necessary. This is no time to commit to big new programs. Instead, let's be smart and pay more attention to building up the state's reserves, to protect taxpayers down the road.

Returning 'justice' to our civil justice system

Our tort system gives citizens an opportunity to recover damages from those liable. When we talk of the need for tort reform, many people think in terms of the medical industry, and understandably so. Premiums for medical malpractice insurance are soaring, causing an alarming number of health care providers to simply quit or leave our state – which in turn reduces access to health care services.



But the same holds true for almost every other industry. Employers everywhere are struggling to pay ever-increasing premiums to protect themselves against lawsuits, and as consumers, we share the burden. It raises the cost of medical insurance, adds to the cost of a new home, and limits options for after-school programs. Condominium construction has mostly shut down in Washington because insurance is not available.

I plan to work this session to support almost a dozen reforms to the tort liability laws of our state that would put the "justice" back in our civil justice system. We can and should do better by service providers, consumers and citizens in general, by adopting a fair, predictable and timely process for addressing liability.

Replacing our primary voting system

As a member of the House State Government committee, I have researched voting systems in hopes of finding a successor to Washington's blanket primary election system, which was declared unconstitutional last fall. The Legislature has debated a replacement before, but the focus has been on variations of the primary systems used in other states.

One innovative method that has my interest is known as "ranked voting". We rank things all the time in opinion polls and in our daily lives, so applying the same principles to elections is not much of a leap.

In a ranked voting system, there would be no primary election. Candidates of all parties, including independents, would appear on the November ballot. Political parties would control who is allowed to use their respective labels on the ballot.



Voters would rank their choices — first, second, third (or more) — and could vote for just one candidate or rank only some of the candidates if they wish. More than one method is available to tabulate ranked votes objectively and unambiguously, to determine which candidate received the strongest support from the greatest number of voters.

A single-cycle election using ranked voting preserves the ability for voters to select from among all candidates on the ballot. Yet it wouldn't infringe on a party's right to determine who can use its label and serve as its spokesperson. Parties would have greater control over who gets to use their labels than they have today.

Voter privacy would be preserved, because there would be no registration by party, no party ballot to select, and no record to be kept of the selection made. The state and counties would realize significant cost savings, because only one election would be held instead of two. Campaign costs would also be reduced, allowing candidates to focus more on issues and voter contact than on fundraising.

Washington has always been a leader in innovation in so many areas; reaching a consensus on a new election system will require innovation as well.



Rep. Nixon is a member of three important committees: Transportation, State Government, and Technology, Telecommunications & Energy.